

U. S. Courthouse and Post Office
(now Jefferson Historical Society Museum)
224 West Austin Street, corner of West
Austin and Market Streets
Jefferson
Marion County
Texas

HABS No. TEX-140

HABS
TEX
158-JEF
13-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
TEX.
158 JEF
13.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TEX-140

U. S. COURTHOUSE AND POST OFFICE
(NOW JEFFERSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM)

Location: 224 West Austin Street, corner of West Austin and Market Streets, Jefferson, Marion County, Texas

Present Owner and Occupant: Jefferson Historical Society

Present Use: Museum

Statement of Significance: This building is a typical example of a small late 19th century Federal building in the Romanesque style.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Construction was started in May, 1888 [correspondence between Supervising Architect and Building Superintendent, May 14, 1888 on file at the Jefferson Historical Society Museum]. The building was completed early in 1890 and first occupied on April 1, 1890 [letter from Custodian, Jefferson, Texas, to Supervising Architect, Washington, D.C., May 9, 1900, in National Archives].
2. Architect: Will A. Freret, Supervising Architect of the Treasury.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of property: Lots No. 7 and 8 in Block No. 20, Urquhart Division of the City of Jefferson.

May 7, 1887, letter from Amelia E. Wood, Jefferson, Texas, to Col. J. D. Phister, Asst. Supervising Architect of the Treasury, Washington, D.C. [in the National Archives, see Sources of Information].

"Dear Sir. I will Donate Lots 7 & 8 of Block No 20 of the Urquhart Division of the City of Jefferson Texas to the United States for a Site for the public building to be erected here as shown in plot fronting 100 feet on Austin Street & 150 feet on Market Street to an Alley and will make deed at any time that I am notified that my Donation is accepted.
[signed] Miss Lizzie Wood"

On June 29, 1887, Miss Wood deeded the property to the United States Government "...for and in consideration of the sum of Ten Dollars to me in hand paid...." /Marion County Deed Book S, p. 318./ Federal papers, however, indicate that the transaction was not completed until September 9, 1887. /Letter to Secretary of Treasury, Washington, D.C., from J. E. McComb, U. S. Attorney, Galveston, Texas, November 3, 1887, in the National Archives./

The building was purchased by the Jefferson Historical Society in January, 1965 /interview with Director, A. K. Payne/.

4. Builders, suppliers, etc.: James H. Coster, 1716 Lombard Street, Baltimore, Md., was the general contractor. The firm's low bid was for \$30,481.00 and a completion time of nine months. Crook, Horner and Company, also of Baltimore, was the steam heating and ventilating contractor. /Synopsis of bids, National Archives./
5. Original plans, history of construction, etc.: A lithograph showing the first and second floor plans and a perspective is in the Jefferson Historical Society Museum. It is dated 1887 and was produced by N. Peters, Photo-Lithographer, Washington, D.C. /copy in HABS photo-data book/.

The following excerpts from contemporary correspondence indicate some of the problems encountered with the site and materials during construction.

Letter from Julius Holmes, Superintendent of Repairs, Jefferson, Texas, to Will A. Freret, Supervising Architect, Washington, D.C., June 20, 1888 /National Archives/.
"Dear Sir; As directed by the Department letter of instructions dated June 2d, 1888 I made a visit to this place and found the work on the new Federal Building now in course of construction progressing satisfactorily; the brick work for the foundations will be completed by July 1st 88, the quality of the Brick used and the character of the work executed meets the conditions of the specifications; all lines being correctly carried out. I found by consultation with the Supt that he had not been supplied with samples of brick upon which the contract for the work above the foundations was based and could not therefore judge as to the class of material needed except by referring /sic/ to the specifications. I found that the face brick delivered from Dallas did not conform to

the specifications and advised the Supt. to reject them not only for this reason but on account of their color and unsuitableness for the face of an exterior wall.

The question of sewerage /sic/ was the next matter for our consideration and its importance in connection with the construction of public buildings demands that every means obtainable should be employed to make the system complete and satisfactory;....

With reference to the interior wood finish I desire to say that the prevailing opinion of the people here is that it should be of Texas yellow curly pine such as has been used in this section on most of the principle /sic/ buildings, judging from what I have seen of material of this character I am inclined to the opinion that it is susceptible of a handsome finish, I therefore recommend that the request of the people here be yielded to by permitting the contractors to use it provided it is done without extra cost to the Government.

As far as the work has progressed I regard it as being executed in a workmanlike manner and is very satisfactory in every respect--

/signed/ Julius Holmes"

In response to adverse criticism by a building inspector, J. M. Vines, Superintendent of Construction, Jefferson, Texas, wrote the following letter to the Supervising Architect of the Treasury on January 16, 1889, outlining the difficulties of obtaining good brick and qualified workmen /National Archives/. "One of the reasons the brick-work looks as bad as it does is that in oiling rough brick the class used here is: that it brings out every apparent or real defect in same - The cement kills the mortar color and in places makes it show lighter than in other places. The contractor is willing to repoint the exterior brickwork in a uniform color. The brickwork was contracted to a firm coming here highly recommended and had bond with them to lay the brick according to plans and specifications. After getting up to second floor line they went away and left the job on account of sickness and after waiting for nearly a month contractor put to work the very best machanics /sic/ he could find. The weather being so hot said workman could not work more than a very few days until they too would be taken sick when they would leave and having so many different men employed on the work and the bricks being of different sizes of thickness, and being compelled to obtain the exterior Red face brick from so many different points. The brick layers in the beginning claimed they could not lay rough brick with the joint specified as it is a known

U. S. COURTHOUSE AND POST OFFICE
(NOW JEFFERSON HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MUSEUM)

HABS No. TEX-140 (Page 4)

fact a rough brick absorbs more moisture than a pressed brick. The bricks also not being pressed brick...The contractor employed in the progress of the work here under my charge the very best machanics to be obtained in this section and paid them the sum of five dollars per day, the best and highest wages paid to any machanics in this section...tried...in every way to have the work done in a manner that would be fully up to the specifications and samples sent...."

Water in the basement was another problem that plagued the contractor. A building inspector who visited the construction site on December 10, 1888 wrote: "The plan... looking to the drainage of the basement...by pipes will be at a larger cost and will only be of temporary utility, as the nearest point to the Bayou to get a sufficient fall will be about 1000 ft.; and they would be liable to fill with sediment during high water...." In March 1889, another inspector wrote to Washington of the same problem [National Archives]. "The basement has water in it... The walls have settled, but not enough to do much damage to the building;...The contractor is now straightening the band courses and watertable and has taken out and replaced two arches, and the brickwork under windows... there are now no cracks visible.

...I am informed that after a heavy rain, or when the river is high,...water stands fully two feet high in basement....

...The plaster work is finished--excepting the court room ceiling and a large portion of the joiner work of second and attic stories is completed and is done in a thoroughly workmanlike manner..."

The following description of the building is contained in the 1901 publication A History of Public Buildings under the Control of the Treasury Department (Exclusive of Marine Hospitals and Quarantine Stations). "This building was authorized by an act of Congress approved February 9, 1887, and appropriated for by acts of March 3, 1887, October 2, 1888, and March 3, 1891 (outstanding liabilities). The site was donated to the United States September 9, 1887, and is bounded on the south 100 feet by Austin street, on the west 150 feet by Market street, and on the north by a 20 foot alley.

Building operations were commenced under a contract awarded April 27, 1888, and the structure was completed and occupied April 1, 1890, the cost of construction being \$52,607.21.

The building is constructed of brick and contains a cubic space of 233,536 feet. It is heated by steam and is occupied by the postal service and United States courts, the number of rooms assigned being twelve.

During the year ended June 30, 1899, the gross postal receipts amounted to \$3,384.53. In 1890 the population of the city was 3,072, and in 1900 it was 2,850."

6. Alterations and additions: All courtroom and post office furniture and trappings have been removed by the Jefferson Historical Society.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Old views:

Photographs taken from the southwest and northwest, dated August 1, 1889, are on file at the Jefferson Historical Society Museum [see copy in HABS photo-data book].

Lithograph of perspective and plans, produced by N. Peters, Photo-Lithographer, Washington, D.C., 1887 is also on file in the Jefferson Historical Society Museum [see copy in HABS photo-data book].

2. Primary and unpublished sources:

Correspondence between the Supervising Architect of the Treasury and the Building Superintendent covering the time of construction is on file at the Jefferson Historical Society Museum.

Correspondence and documents relating to the construction of the building are in the National Archives, Washington, D.C., filed with the "Records of the Public Buildings Service, Title Papers and General Correspondence" under the title "Jefferson, Texas Post Office and Court House." (Record Group 121; Stack Area 16E-3, 16E-1; Tray 879; and one folder.)

Interview with the Director of the Jefferson Historical Society Museum, A. K. Payne.

Marion County Deed Books, in the Marion County Court House, Jefferson, Texas.

3. Secondary and published sources:

A History of Public Buildings Under the Control of the
Treasury Department (Exclusive of Marine Hospitals
and Quarantine Stations). Washington: Government
Printing Office, 1901.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Built when Jefferson had a population of approximately 3000, this building, in Romanesque style, is typical of many small federal buildings throughout the west that date from this period.
2. Condition of fabric: Good. Well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 52'-7" (three-bay front) x 70'-7" (four bays); two-and-a-half stories on raised basement, ell shaped.
2. Foundations: Brick above and below grade. The exterior of the foundation wall below grade is finished with 1" of cement plaster.
3. Wall construction: Brick was used throughout, common bond. Some of the brick was manufactured locally by the Meisenheimer and Caplin plant.
4. Chimneys: One. Brick.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The courtroom entrance, which is in the base of the central tower on the southeast facade, is characterized by a round arch with sculptured imposts and decorative brick archivolt. The post office entrance on the southwest elevation has rectangular side and transom lights in a round-arched opening which corresponds to the three window openings on that elevation. The arched portion of the opening contains a fanlight. The doors to the post office work room on the rear (northwest) elevation are double, contained in a round-arched opening with paneled transoms.

- b. Windows: Window openings in the basement have segmental arches and fixed sash. First floor openings have round arches with ornamental brick archivolts. Most openings contain two one-over-one double hung wooden windows, with a fanlight filling the arched opening above. Second-floor windows, except in the courtroom, are double-hung wooden sash in segmental-arched openings. On the southwest and northeast sides of the courtroom are large triple windows spanned by iron lintel beams over which there are relieving arches and basketweave brickwork. Each of the windows has large two-over-two double-hung sash with rectangular transom lights. Segmental arched openings on the northwest (rear) of the courtroom have two double-hung wooden windows per opening, separated by a colonnette.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Over the courtroom there is a gable roof with ridge running parallel to the front facade. It is somewhat higher than the hipped roof which covers the front of the building. Asphalt shingles now replace the original shingles which were slate (samples of the original shingles are in the garret). The ridge of the gable roof has a galvanized-iron cresting. Some cresting has been removed from the hipped roof.
- b. Framing: Two heavy timber trusses with iron bottom-stringers span the courtroom, supporting 2 by 10 joists. The remainder of the roof is framed with 2 by 10 joists. There is a trapdoor from the garret to the roof.
- c. Cornice: Ornamental brick work.
- d. Drainage system: Galvanized-iron gutters and downspouts comprise the roof drainage system. It was the original intention that the water from the downspouts should be collected in pipes and carried beneath the ground to the cistern for the purpose of supplying water that would be fit for drinking purposes. (Correspondence between Supervising Architect and Building Superintendent, August 15, 1889.)

- e. Dormers: There are two shed-roofed dormers on the northeast side. These provide light to a third-floor jury room and a restroom.
- f. Tower: The four-stage tower is approximately 80' high and is surmounted by a steep hipped roof with galvanized-iron cresting and finials. There are triple windows at the second through fourth stages.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: The first floor contained the post office. On the second floor were the courtroom and offices for the judge, marshall, clerk and attorney. The jury room was located on the third floor. A grand jury room and service spaces were located in the basement.
- 2. Stairways: There is one stairway located in the tower. Between the first and second floors, there are two landings with unequal stair runs between them. There is one landing between the second and third floors. Stairways have turned balusters, square newels with some carving. A secondary stair runs from the first floor lobby to the basement.
- 3. Flooring: Basement floor is now concrete, originally it was earth (correspondence between Supervising Architect and Building Superintendent). The area that was formerly the public lobby to the post office is paved with 5-3/4" by 8" marble slabs. The remainder of the building has 3"-wide, native, vertical-grain, hard, yellow-pine floors.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster throughout.
- 5. Doors and transoms: The first floor has eight-panel wooden doors. Door jambs have four panels on each side. These panels match the door panels in heights. On the second floor the doors have eight panels and glass transoms. The third floor has six-panel doors with glass transoms.
- 6. Trim: Wood, molded. Door and window trim has corner blocks and plinths.
- 7. Hardware: Hammered bronze. Some hardware has been replaced recently.

8. Mechanical equipment:

- a. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures.
- b. Heating: Originally steam. Also, there is a fireplace in the post office workroom and one in the clerk's office.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The building occupies a 100' by 150' lot. The main entry faces southeast. There is a wrought-iron fence on the southeast and southwest sides. Sidewalks are concrete.

Prepared by Willard B. Robinson, AIA
Supervisory Architect, HABS
National Park Service
July 1966

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made in 1966 during a summer project financed by the National Park Service to record 16 structures in Jefferson and the near-by area. The summer recording team received the cooperation of numerous citizens and organizations who provided office space, lodgings, board, and research assistance. Among the cooperators were the Dan Lester Drilling Company, the Excelsior Hotel, Mrs. A. K. Payne, the Jessie Allen Wise Garden Club, and the Marion County Chamber of Commerce.

The project was under the direction of A. Lewis Koue of the Historic American Buildings Survey's Western Office in San Francisco. Supervisor of the recording team was Willard B. Robinson, AIA, of Texas Technological College. The team was composed of student architects David L. Bouse of the University of Nebraska, Bob J. Fong of the University of Idaho, Donald Quackenbush of Washington State University, and Robert M. Swanson of the University of Texas. Photographs were made by National Park Service Photographer, Jack E. Boucher.